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Ininisiwin ekasis'pohtahk watichkwanihk ohci
(The Inherent Wisdom Carries On From The Roots)

by

Patricia J. Steinhauer ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

In

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Ininisiwin ekasis'pohtahk watichkwanihk ohci** (The Inherent Wisdom Carries On From The Roots) submitted by Patricia J. Steinhauer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in First Nations Education.

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Dedication

I dedicate this document to my heros, my parents; Genevieve and Walter Steinhauer.

To the memory of Dr. Lionel Kinuwa.

To the First Nations students who inspired this study and granted such wonderful insights. I honor their resiliency and wisdom each carry with them in their life journeys.

To all First Nations youth, children, and those still to come.

Abstract

This study looks at achievement as voiced by adolescent Aboriginal students in a First Nations community in Alberta. Ultimately the study shows that it is not the students who have failed to achieve but rather it is a system that has failed Aboriginal students by not allowing them to achieve. Insights into Indigenous Knowledge and recommendations for the future are given.

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Table Of Contents

Chapter — Page

I Ininisiwin ekasis'pohtahk watihkwanihk ohci (The Inherent Wisdom Carries On From The Roots.....1

Background.....1
Purpose and Focus of the Study.....2
The Boundaries of This Study.....4
Significance of the Study.....4
My Personal Bias.....5
Definitions and Terms.....6

II The Background Literature.....8

Self Esteem and Cultural Identity.....8
Self Esteem.....9
Indian Identity.....11
Social Construction of Aboriginal Society.....13
Evolving and Changing Cultural Norms.....14
Indian Community Norms.....17
Issues in the Reserve Community.....20
Suicide and Related Issues.....23
Learning Styles as Factors in Student Achievement.....26
Aboriginal Teachers Teaching Aboriginal Students.....30

III Methodology.....33

The Tree.....34
Bridging the Gap.....36
Study Design.....36
Data Gathering Procedures: Research Circles.....37
Data Gathering Procedures: Interviews.....38
The Participants.....39
Data Analysis.....39
Anonymity, Accuracy, and Ethical Considerations.....40
The Setting for My Study.....41

IV Presentation and Analysis of the Data.....43

Analyzing the Process.....43
The Composite Vignettes: The Leaves on the Tree.....46
Andy.....46

Nicole....47
Sheila....48
Joel....48
Tyler....49
Leanne....50

The Themes of the Study....50
The Issue of Racism....50
Peer Pressure....57
Drugs and Alcohol....62
Teen Pregnancy....64
Poverty....69
School and Community....72
"Taken For Granted"....75
"They Want Us To Act As Adults"....76

V My Conclusions With Recommendations and Hopes For The Future....78

The Tree Analogy....82
Recommendations For the Future....85
My Own Commitment....86

References....87

CHAPTER I

Ininisiwin ekasis'pohtahk watihkwanihk ohci

(The Inherent Wisdom Carries On From The Roots)

Background

I have had the privilege of teaching and learning in a First Nations[1] School setting for the past seven years. Being a First Nations member residing within the community has granted many insights as a First Nations educator. The experience of being raised within the community established the empathy I share with students. In my practice I have made many observations and have come to learn that most students, particularly adolescents, face adverse factors that affect their completion of school as well as the fulfillment of their academic dreams.

On a daily basis I witness Aboriginal[2] students struggling with issues of identity; with personal identity, with cultural identity and with community identity. Traditional knowledge and cultural practices appear to be eroding and disappearing yet expectations are placed upon students to understand and practice cultural knowledge. Elders, teachers, and parents preach at students, expecting these same students to understand and to live a life that has not been modeled for them.

---

[1] Most Indian reserves in Canada prefer to be called First Nations. This relatively new nomenclature signifies a new found pride in their cultural roots and a unique positioning of Indigenous peoples within the Canadian Mosaic. In this study I use the terms *First Nations Community* and *Reserve* interchangeably.

[2] Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous, Indian, are terms used interchangeably in this research to refer to the people that I study and learn from.

As First Nations communities and individuals struggle with these effects of colonization a new sense of awareness seems to be emerging. First Nations Schools are now managed from within the community. This relatively new concept has brought a sense of pride and ownership to First Nations Communities. But this new ownership is not without its problems. Many Aboriginal students still underachieve in school and far too many do not complete their formal education.

In my experience First Nations students have their own unique views of their community. The reserve can be a positive and safe place for a young student in his or her earlier school years. This sense of well being however appears to shift for many during adolescence. Youth generally seem to view the reserve community as a "dead end" in terms of academic pursuits. Their weak grasp of two worlds, the reserve community and mainstream society, creates difficulty in finding a place of comfort and safety in either setting.

Purpose and Focus of the Study

I am concerned with the number of students from my own reserve who drop out of school before they are finished or who complete and feel that their education has not been a good experience and has left them with feelings of apathy. They feel unprepared to encounter life outside of school and often become society drop outs. Still other Aboriginal students stay in school in body only having effectively dropped out of the learning process many years prior to

their completion of school. If I am able to grapple with this issue and to get a handle on some answers that may change these trends, my research just may have far reaching effects. I want Aboriginal students to have positive experiences with education and I want them to be able to share the knowledge and answers that they hide within themselves.

I believe that Aboriginal teens possess knowledge that has been overlooked by researchers and has not been given the credit it deserves. In my attempts to access this knowledge, I had to be careful in my approach in asking questions and listening to answers. This became the focus of my research. I wanted to know from them just how they viewed themselves within their own cultural settings. What did they perceive as the cultural norms within the Aboriginal community? What did they perceive as conditions that affected their success or failure within the school setting? Basically then my overall research question could read something like this: "From the Perspective of Aboriginal Teens Living on the Reserve, What Factors Affect Academic Achievement?" If I could get a set of answers to this question then I and other educators might begin to make changes in our teaching practices and in our attitudes towards students. So as not to unnecessarily bias my research I chose students to interview who came from an anonymous community. These students became my informants and my teachers. I am each day amazed and thankful for the insights that they have given me.

The Boundaries of This Study

This study took place in one reserve community located within the province of Alberta. It was designed to identify specifically the issues perceived by those involved in the study. It therefore cannot be expected to be an exhaustive text that reflects all the issues encountered by all First Nations youth. The study participants are grade 7-12 First Nations students attending one reserve school in the Province of Alberta.

Although there is a good chance that the students interviewed for this study could speak for others in much the same position in the same community they certainly should not be expected to represent all First Nations students in all First Nations communities. Nor can this study speak to the issues faced by urban native students. They have their own unique answers. Issues will vary from community to community, from family to family, and from individual to individual. As well, there are many differing cultural groups within the Indigenous framework. Each culture will have specific answers. These answers must come from future research.

Significance of the Study

I believe that the issues raised and the resulting answers emanating from this study will provide assistance to three areas in particular. First this information will provide educators with valuable background information when planning and implementing curriculum changes. Often this is one source of

information lacking when educators begin the task of making change. All too often educators attempt to write curriculum within a void. The information that they do have often comes from other educators or from past encounters or experiences which are themselves part of the issue.

The community too should benefit from the insights expressed by their young people. These are fresh new ideas and have been delivered with honesty and sincerity. They could have relevance when planning recreation and leisure activities in the community. As well they could be used for future community development. If we listen to our young people they cannot say that we do not care.

Finally the study will provide the reserve community school as well as the Provincial Department of Education with information for future training programs for future teachers who will work with First Nations.

My Personal Bias

As a First Nations member and teacher I have some very specific biases. I want Aboriginal students to succeed and be happy in life. If that success and happiness can be part of their schooling experience, so much the better. I believe that First Nations peoples have their own answers and that only when both the questions and answers come from them will their destinies be enriched. These biases come through in my work. I do not hide them nor do I wish to. Possibly these biases have made me even more careful to listen very closely and to report

very succinctly the words of my informants. If I am not true to them then I am not true to my community or to myself.

Definitions of Terms

Aboriginal: As defined by Frideres (1998) the term Aboriginal is referred in the same context as Indian (pp. 22-23). In this study I use the term Aboriginal when I refer specifically to treaty Indians.

Indian: According to the Indian Act, a person registered as an Indian in the Indian Registry (Hawley, 1986, pp. 9-10).

Treaty Indian: An Indian whose ancestors were signators to treaties with The Queen of England and The Government of Canada or who married (before 1985) a treaty Indian.

First Nations People: Aboriginal peoples, including treaty and non-treaty Indians, Metis and Inuit (Krotz, 1992, p.155).

Native American Indian: A comprehensive term used mostly in the United States to describe people native to North America. For American people this term usually describes Indigenous peoples who come from the United States.

Indian Reserve: Areas of Federal Crown land. Land that was granted at the signing of the treaties. It is for exclusive occupation, use, exploitation and development of Indian Bands.

Indian Band: According to the Indian Act, Band refers to; "(a) a body of Indians

for whose use and benefit in common, lands, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, have been set apart; (b) for whose use and benefit in common, monies are held by Her Majesty; or (c) declared by the Governor General in Council to be a band for the purposes of this Act" (Hawley, 1986, p.1).

CHAPTER II

The Background Literature

I found that many researchers had already looked at Aboriginal student achievement. I have scanned their work and have divided their attempts to name the factors that affect achievement into a number of categories.

Self Esteem and Cultural Identity

Probably the greatest number of researchers identified self esteem as the key element in the success or failure of Aboriginal students within the school system. They however cannot agree that Aboriginal students do poorly academically due to a lack of self esteem.

Although self esteem is a Euro-American culture based concept which is centered on the individual person's perception of their self it can be viewed as relevant to understanding an individual within the Indian culture (Pepper and Henry, 1991). Pepper and Henry explain that the Indian way of life considers the wholeness of things. Life is viewed as an interactive process within the physical, social, and spiritual environments. An outcome of the kind of interactions individuals experience within their world is the sense of self esteem (ibid). Further to this belief Indian people do not identify themselves as individuals rather they identify themselves within their environment and community. Bryan, in Dodd, Nelson, Hofland (1985), explain that Native American Indians are more likely to refer to themselves collectively to groups of

Indian peoples since their identity stems from their tribal affiliation and the differences found there to other Indian nations. Self esteem and Indian identity will be examined more closely in relation to each other.

Self Esteem

Self esteem is a concept that individuals develop throughout the course of their lives. In a more general context it is defined by the following:

> Self esteem fully realized, is experience that we are appropriate to life and to the requirements of life. More specifically, self esteem is:
> 1) Confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life, and
> 2) Confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values, and enjoy the fruits of our efforts.
>
> (Brandon, 1994, p.4).

Pepper and Henry (1991) integrate self esteem with the Medicine wheel as a way of understanding a child's development within their social context. This conceptual model of self esteem separates characteristics into four parts. Those parts when put together can be viewed as holistic with each relying on the next to create the circle of life. They describe the Medicine Wheel as a circle of harmony and of courage. More specifically the Medicine Wheel can be explained as follows:

> It is a testimony of the American Indian's ability to survive and to maintain a balance between the physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural aspects of life. The goal of the traditional Indian was to strike a harmonious balance in life. It is believed that the power of the world worked in circles, represented by the symbol of the wheel. With Natives, the circle stands for togetherness. An Indian tribe is only one part of the universe. The universe is circular and is made up of the earth, sun, and the stars, which are round. The moon, the horizon, and the rainbow are circles within circles, with no beginning and no end. To Natives this is a beautiful and

> fitting-symbol and reality at the same time-expressing the harmony of life and nature. The Indian circle is timeless, flowing: it is new life emerging. (Pepper and Henry, 1991, p.146).

There are variations in meanings, symbols, and colors of the Medicine Wheel that may differ from one part of the country to another or from tribe to tribe. There is however a universal application to the form of the wheel for Indian people (Pepper and Henry, 1991).

Pepper and Henry (1991) adapt Bean's model of self-esteem and integrate it into the four directions of the Medicine Wheel circle. Bean explains that in order for children to have high self esteem they must experience the four conditions of self-esteem: Connectiveness, Uniqueness, Power, and appropriate Modelling.

Connectiveness- or attachment is the sense of relationships in the attention and affection of others. By letting the child know that he or she belongs and is accepted in the culture and the family.

Power- is shown by a sense of accomplishment, by letting the child realize he or she is competent and can be successful.

Uniqueness- is a feeling of being special and a feeling of worthiness, of talents and productive contributions being affirmed by values of his or her culture and of significant others.

Models- involves the development of a sense of knowing that his or her goals and standards are appropriate and important and affirmed by his or her Indian

values of generosity and sharing.

(Bean in Pepper and Henry, 1991, p.150-158).

Indian Identity

Since Aboriginal people tend to identify with a collective group, individual identity evolves within the group setting with a reliance on the cultural beliefs of that group. Nagel explains:

> If identity is the cognitive, cerebral component of ethnicity, culture is its heart and lifeblood. Those ideational and material aspects of social life-language, religion, ceremony, myth, beliefs, values, folkways, mores, kinship, worldview, as well as the worlds of art, music, tools, food, housing, dress, adornment-are the substance of a people. Culture is the magnet that attracts and repels. Its commonalities pull us together; its differences push us apart. It both smooths and stymies communication, supports and subverts understanding. It cultivates cohesion, yet is the breeding ground of ethnocentrism. Culture underlies both the universal and the unique in human societies.
>
> (1996, p.4)

Aboriginal people use the practice of their culture to create group identity and thus individual identity.

European contact and the introduction of formal schooling has had a large impact on the identity development of Indigenous peoples. As well, "the systemic destruction of Native culture and identity through the educational system has had a long history in Canada" (Dawson, 1988, p.45). "Fuchs and Havighurst (1973) observed that Indian students register a significant drop in achievement motivation beginning around grade 7-about the time they are becoming increasingly aware of their own 'Indianness'" (Wood and Clay, 1996, p.45). The

most obvious systemic destruction is probably the residential school system which was introduced in the late 1800s and persisted through the 1980s (Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun, 1997). These schools were European based and meant to transform Indian cultures and beliefs into European/Christian paradigms. "Anglos constructed institutions which represented Anglo values and beliefs" (Dehyle, 1992, p.33). Missionaries "set up rudimentary schools to teach the Natives the basic tenents of Christianity, elementary reading and writing, prayers, hymns, and some trades and agricultural skills" (Dawson 1988, p.43). The underlying philosophy of assimilation guided all early interactions with Indians (Dehyle, 1992). "The problem of the loss of traditional culture created by residential schools and other mainstream assimilative forces remain significant" as a factor in Aboriginal student achievement until this day (Rice and Steckly, 1998, p.5).

The treatment experienced by Indian students attending residential schools was often negative and humiliating. The effects of such treatment affected children in many ways. Coopersmith in Dodd, Nelson, Hofland (1994) explains "that domination, rejection, and severe punishment result in low self-esteem" (p.310). Indian children experienced shame by having their hair cut and clothing replaced by inappropriate and foreign clothing. They were punished for speaking their language, maintaining their religious beliefs, and engaging in activities Elders taught them (Dodd, Nelson, Hoffland, 1994). The effects of the residential schools are still prevalent today. Children of the residential school have become

parents and grandparents and many of the problems in regards to loss of culture and language have continued.

For the sake of this study some selected works on identity development seem appropriate to note since it was adolescents that I sought answers from. Trimble (1987) found that variations in self and ideal self can be attributed to the dynamics associated with sociocultural change. During adolescence individuals are faced with creating their identity. In their study Aries and Moorhead (1989) found that although identity development takes place throughout the life course it has normative crisis during adolescence. It is at this stage that commitments are made which provide a sense of continuity with the past yet construct a pathway toward the future. Tatum (1997), who studied Black adolescents, explains the "search for personal identity that intensifies in adolescence can involve several dimensions of an adolescent's life: vocational plans, religious beliefs, values and preferences, political affiliations and beliefs, gender roles, and ethnic identities" (p.53). Individuals do not explore all domains at once but rather explore one and possibly another dimension while the others remains partially examined.

Social Construction of Aboriginal Society

Wax (1971) believes that the social organization of Indian society can be either an egalitarian or more complex one similar to the 'civilized societies' led by elites. The community Indian band structure however is more egalitarian with a direct relationship to resources and norms (such as sharing) that exist within the

band community organization (Wax, 1971). Trimble (1987) explains that many "Indians, especially those residing on reservations, maintain that they have little control over their own destiny. Furthermore, among American Indians, tribal and government relationships have created intense feelings of resentment and hostility" (p.329). In his study however Trimble (1987) found Indian students to perceive themselves to be of worth, satisfied with themselves, and believe they are on an equal plane with others. The results of his study found Indian students to have a moderately positive self image contradicting previous research that claimed otherwise. Indian adolescents appear to find acceptance and familiarity within their community structure.

Evolving and Changing Cultural Norms

"Native Americans are indeed a heterogenous group, with each tribe having its own distinct culture, language, and social customs...Many tribes embrace traditional ritual, whereas others are very contemporary. Nevertheless, they do share many values and historical, political, and educational commonalities; which can provide a basis for some generalizations" (Safran, Safran, Pirozak, 1994, p.51). The North American Native culture has long been recognized to differ substantially from the dominant white or non-native society (Brant 1990); however, even though it is different from the dominant society native culture is constantly changing and evolving. As Native American cultures change, their impact on child development is noticeable and raises major

concerns. Whereas former practices prepared the child for his or her future in an integrated family and tribal organization Anglo society has attempted to make the child individualistic. Berlin (1987) believes that the conflict created in these very diverse cultural norms has led to alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, etc.

"The passing of a culture learned from one generation to another becomes the traditional culture-an instinctive assurance of continuity, together which ensures adherence to tradition. Traditional culture as an ongoing process becomes the long-term social mechanism which insures the healthy survival of the next generation. Each new generation through an ongoing process is thus equipped in the specific ways which give that group cultural identity" (Armstrong, 1987, p.15). However when this traditional culture is challenged uncertainty and vexation becomes the result. Individual and group survival for Indian people was dependent upon the harmonious interpersonal relationship and cooperation among members of a group (Brant, 1990). For most Aboriginal people, the family is the center of life, with children and Elders at the heart of existence. This is not the case for most Aboriginal children who attend school. The teacher in the classroom becomes the center and the person to whom students must direct their attention and respect. Often this focus negates the cultural norm of respect for parents and Elders. "The concept of the extended family is important to Native Americans and supports a kinship system combining relatives from both sides of the family, often including non related friends"

(Safran, Safran, Pirozak, 1994, p.51). Elders play an important role within the Indian community. However Elders now "often have little use for school since they see it as taking their children away from tradition into a destructive and alien world. Thus, native American children throughout their school experience, especially in adolescence, find there is no one to support their eagerness to learn or their special talents, and their cognitive development goes unnurtured" (Berlin, 1987, p.301).

For "many native children, a public display violates community or group norms and may be an uncomfortable experience. Perhaps it is this respect for norms that is responsible for the stereotypic 'silent Indian child'" (Swisher, 1991, p.2). This cultural norm is significant in a society where students are expected to speak up and are challenged openly to express their knowledge verbally. These cultural values of Indian students affect their desires to perform and achieve academically in school. "Often a very able student will hide academic competence to avoid seeming superior" (Swisher, 1991, p.2). "In many Native societies, the humility of the individual is a position to be respected and preserved. Advancing oneself above others or taking oneself too seriously violates this key value. If Native children learn best cooperatively, they will experience discomfort and conflicts in the classrooms that are too competitive or in which the competition is unfair" (ibid).

Indian Community Norms

In many places "Native American life is an unhurried, never-ending process with a basic philosophy of 'live and let live.' At its center is the attainment of a harmonious relationship between all living things and nature" (Safran, Safran, Pirozak, 1994, p. 51). Brant (1990) believes that to ensure survival in an often hostile environment, Native societies find it essential to maintain group unity and cohesiveness. Hence, every effort was made to avoid interpersonal conflict among members of the group, a tendency that has persisted even into modern times (Brant, 1990, p.538). He attempts to identify and analyze certain Native ethics, values and rules of behavior which persist as carry overs from Aboriginal cultures and influence Native thinking and action today. If one follows these rules certainly he/she would have conflict with the educational system.

1) The Ethic of Non-Interference- This principle essentially means that an Indian will never interfere in anyway with the rights, privileges of another person.
2) The Ethic that Anger Not Be Shown- This ethic under very close living arrangements provides certain privacy which is not otherwise possible. Your own ideas and thoughts are kept to yourself.
3) The Ethic of Respecting Praise and Gratitude- Traditionally the proper way to show appreciation is to ask the other person to continue with his contribution rather than to offer vocal expressions of gratitude.
4) The Conservation-Withdrawal Tactic- This is a mental preparation aspect of

behavior-of thinking things through before actually trying them (and refusing to act until the terrain is familiar).

5) The Notion That the Time Must Be Right- Doing things when it is most appropriate to do them.

6) The Ethic of Non-Competitiveness- Suppressing conflict by averting intragroup rivalry and preventing embarrassment.

(These ethics are synthesized from Brant in Ross 1992)

Although the above are an explanation and presentation of ethics, values, and rules of behavior it is important to remember that this is not all nor a complete understanding of all behaviors of Indian groups (Brant, 1990). "In order to reinforce and promote these behaviors, which can be classified generally as forms of conflict repression, it was necessary from earliest times to develop a number of superego constructs that would prevent deviations from these principles without causing intense anxiety" (Brant, 1990, p.537). One can see how significant these ethics become in a classroom structure dominated by white European culture.

Indian children are reared quite differently from non-Indian children. Deyhle and LeCompte (1984) present the differences between non Anglo and Navajo child development and parenting practices. They examine how the design of middle schools is informed by cultural differences in the ways Anglos and Navajos view the stages of human development and their concomitant requisites

for appropriate parenting.

Table 1

Some Cultural Differences in Adult/Child Role Expectation

Anglo	Navajo
9- 15 year olds:	9-15 year olds;
• are still children; they do not become adults until at least 18	• are becoming adults; they become adults after puberty
• are too immature to make their own decisions	• must learn to make their own decisions and assume the consequences
• do not know what is best for them	• are acquiring understanding of what is in their best interests
• should do what adults tell them to do	• should not be forced to do something they are unwilling to do
Adults:	Adults:
• are responsible for their children's behavior	• do not control their children's behavior
• must make wise decisions on behalf of their children obey their directions	• should not interfere in the behavior decisions of others, even their own children
• must make their children obey their direction	• can only provide suggestions and guidance for behavior
• must prevent sexual activity among their children	• should discourage sexual activity among children
• should permit gender undifferentiated work/social activities, roles, and expectations among their children	• should encourage gender segregated work/social activities, roles, and expectations among their children
• show they care for their children by controlling them	• show they care about their children by respecting their independence

(Deyhle and LeCompte, 1994, p.158)

The role expectations by each parent differ significantly. Navajo children are granted more freedom to discover and experience life on their own. More emphasis is placed on the trust of the child to make decisions on their own. The expectation of adolescents, young men and women to behave more maturely is

evident in their inclusion to various activities. It is common for adolescents to be included in adult company and also are care givers to younger siblings and infants (O'Nell and Mitchell, 1996). In comparison, young white children are seldom included in adult gatherings or functions (Kaulback, 1984).

Issues in the Reserve Community

It is interesting as a First Nations researcher to read the works of non-native researchers who have examined our communities from afar. They seem to have formulated very definite ideas about who we are and how we operate our lives. Let me provide just a few examples of how they see our communities operating and how they see this affecting the academic achievement of Aboriginal students.

"For the youngest generation, history has set the stage for their awareness of Indian identity, deriving from family values and popular media images of traditional Plains Indian life, and it has set the stage for the emotional valence of Indian identity for individuals and families as their families choices about how to make a living in an economically insecure environment are linked rhetorically to Indian values" (O'Nell and Mitchell, 1996, p.569). "Reservation life is characterized by many serious problems. These include poverty, substandard housing and high rates of unemployment" (Long, 1986, p.248). Levine in Wood and Clay (1996) made observations "that as children become older they develop an acute sense of their status in society, and approaching adolescence they

become increasingly aware of their own chances of rising within the existing opportunity structure" (p.43). As children enter adolescence they move into a stage of development that is clearly marked with new opportunities and new responsibilities. Within that new world, adolescents find themselves having to negotiate new relationships shifting and sorting with sometimes unclear significance (O'Nell and Mitchell, 1996).

The "extended family is of critical importance to the maintenance of tradition in most Indian communities. Traditionally, the grandparents raise the children and the parents provide the economic sustenance" (Berlin, 1987, p.225). "Family chaos, alcoholic parents, high unemployment rates, child neglect and abuse, and high incidences of alcoholic young mothers and babies with fetal alcohol syndrome all seem to exist in the tribes that have abandoned their traditional ways of living" (ibid, p.227). Unfortunately most reservations with high unemployment rates depend upon social programs such as welfare for economic survival (Berlin, 1987). One effect of unemployment is that it offers an incentive for some adolescent girls to become unwed mothers with several children as it provides for a higher rate of income from welfare programs (ibid, p.225). Taking the general living situation on reservations into consideration the combination of high unemployment, a high rate of general violence, poor housing, and overall poverty provide persons little opportunity for optimism and fosters hopelessness (Long 1986). For youth the conditions provide little optimism and

hope for their future, "The biggest problem for Native youth today is that they feel hopeless" (Minore, Boone, Katt, and Kinch, 1991, p.11).

Adolescents experience difficulties in inter-personal relationships both in the family and peer group (O'Nell and Mitchell, 1996). In adolescence Indian youths must learn to negotiate a culturally rooted and valued style of sociability within their community. Belonging to the primary kin group, to a peer group, and to a stable romantic dyad must be negotiated through acts of alliance and generosity (ibid). The "most stable members of a teen's circle of friends are his or her relatives. Regardless of the instability of many groups, however, belonging to a group is essential in providing teens with the social strength to display the courage to negotiate the threats and slander of competing groups and individuals" (O'Nell and Mitchell, 1996, p.572). "For both boys and girls, these circles of friends provide the group through which they derive an important part of their identity, and a context within which they negotiate the display of courage or strength" (ibid). "In adolescence, however young people begin to enter into increasingly consequential relationships with peers, romantic partners and the wider community" (ibid). "The difference in the importance of romantic relationships for boys and girls point to the shared perception that security is realized by having ties to young men-the best way for boys to achieve such security is to belong to a gang of 'brothers' whereas for girls it is to be the 'girlfriend' of a powerful young man who can garner support from his 'brothers"

(ibid). "Today girls are thought to be modest if they do not 'run around' with different guys, or get themselves into compromising positions while drinking" (ibid). "However whether in the display of courage by either boys or girls, or in the display of modesty by young women, a teenager's behavior reflects strongly on the family's honor"(ibid).

As a Aboriginal researcher I could not help but feel a sense of anger at the perpetuation of stereotypes created by many of these published works. My sense of knowing and understanding Aboriginal youth from within the culture is very different from that of someone who comes from outside and looks in. The problem is that there are tidbits of truths in everything that is said. The harm comes when these small truths are generalized to everybody.

Suicide and Related Issues

Suicide in many Native communities is common. In one given community nearly every person has experienced first-hand the pain of a young person's suicide (Minore, Boone, Katt, and Kinch, 1991). Although they are not necessarily connected, Berlin (1987) believes that Indian communities with a high adolescent suicide rate also experience high rates of alcoholism among their adolescents. Traditionally the tribes that are more stable in terms of religious traditions, clan, and extended families experience smaller numbers of suicides. Conversely, in the less traditional tribes, where pressures to acculturate are greater and there is extensive tribal conflict about maintaining religion,

governmental structure, clans, societies, and extended families the suicide rate in the adolescent and young adult population is higher (Berlin, 1987).

Long (1986) believes that "A final important risk factor is the lack of anonymity on reservations, which tends to increase the likelihood of an epidemic spread of suicide" (p.250). This is particularly so for the adolescents who are greatly influenced by peer behaviors. "In sparsely populated geographic areas people tend to know each other well" (Ibid). Suicide in a Native community affects the entire community.

The majority of Native Canadians, particularly during adolescence, internalize feelings of frustration and accept failure as a result of their personal shortcomings (Minore, Boone, Kinch, 1991, Long 1986). "Often passive acceptance is the outward behavior, while internally there is little chance to resolve or release building anger and dissatisfaction. As a result, violence occurs explosively, and is often turned against the self or others close to the self" (Long, 1986, p.245). As a result of many of the internalized problems adolescents rely on various coping mechanisms. "Substance abuse, in particular alcohol intoxication, is often used in an effort to cope with the high level of frustration" (Ibid, p.250). "Alcoholism is a pervasive problem on many reservations" (ibid, p.245).

The cultural roles of members of the Native community have changed invariably. The role of elders in particular have suffered profound losses. In their

study Minore, Boone, Katt, and Kinch (1991) present the following:

> A growing 'generation gap' between youth and Elders," has been detected in communities. And the 'Elders' failure to pass on Aboriginal wisdom and tradition to younger generations' has resulted in inadequate cultural grounding for many adolescents. There is 'a lack of connectedness to Aboriginal culture and language, particularly the Medicine Wheel and the Healing Circle.' This gap in knowledge is experienced at an emotive level as a 'loss of self-reliance and cultural identity.' In contrast, some participants identified 'a lack of religious beliefs or faith' or more specifically, ' a lack of grounding in the Bible or respect for Sundays' as causative factors. But this merely reflects the diversity of influences that shape the present day Aboriginal Culture. At issue are conflicts in the value system of two and sometimes three generations.
>
> (Minore, Boone, Katt, and Kinch, 1991, p.11).

The two value system that has evolve in the communities certainly can be attributed to the generation gap between Indian youth and elders of the community. The roles of the members become confused by two worlds within the community.

Minore, Boone, Katt and Kinch (1991) explain perhaps the one issue most widely recognized as a negative influence on the Nishnawbe-Aski youth is the negative influences of the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. Influence of drugs, alcohol, substance abuse, violent responses shown by role models from TV movies, from books, pornography and involvement with satanic rituals create cultural confusion for the Nishnawbe youth (ibid). "A particular striking factor is the mix of transcultural pressures and prejudices resulting in a "no win" situation for Indian youths. Youths see themselves as being devoid of their Indian cultural background, while at the same time being treated with extreme prejudice by the

surrounding white community" (Long, 1986, p.249). Youth face a unique form of "double jeopardy"; they face difficulties adjusting to non-Native culture and as well they experience a degree of isolation within their community and culture (Minore, Boone, Katt, and Kinch, 1991).

Learning Styles as Factors in Student Achievement

It seems that a number of researcher have been able to find a link between how Aboriginal students learn (and are taught) and how well they succeed in school. Wilson (1994 and 1998) found that minority students and in particular Aboriginal students had significantly different learning styles from their mainstream counterparts. Although her study took place in a university setting I believe it has relevance as well in both an elementary and high school setting. Wilson found that most Aboriginal students portrayed a concrete-experiential-intuitive learning platform while the remainder of students in her study tended toward abstract-structured and teacher directed learning. This phenomenon would place Aboriginal students at a disadvantage in most classrooms since most teachers teach from their own unique learning style pattern. That is, teachers' teaching styles coincide with their learning styles and most teachers of native students are non-Natives.

Mc Inerney and Swisher (1995) also say that Native children appear to be at a disadvantage with regard to academic achievement and school retention and cite "demographic variables such as home background and geographical isolation,

educational variables such as inappropriate curriculum and negative teacher expectations, socio-economic factors such as ill health and poverty, and biological and cultural factors such as mismatch between native learning styles and motivation and that fostered by a western-oriented school system" (p.28-29).

In approaching the issues of Native learning styles, we are confronted with a range of problems and dangers (Sawyer, 1991). The term learning style is defined by More (1989) as the "characteristic or usual strategies of acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding of an individual" (p.17). Appleton (1983) further defines learning styles "as the method by which one comes to know or understand the world. It is the accustomed pattern used to acquire information, concepts, and skills" (in Swisher, 1991, p.2). And More, in Sawyer (1991), suggests "four learning style bipolarities-global vs. analytic (or simultaneous rather than successive) processing, imaginal vs. verbal coding, concrete vs. abstract learning, and trial and error vs. 'think-(or watch) then do' patterns. He suggests Native students tend toward the global, imaginal, concrete, and think-then-do poles" (p.100).

"Children have been classified according to their performance on visual, auditory, and kinesthetic perceptual tests...The assumption behind matching teaching to sensory modality in this way is that one sensory channel, either visual, auditory or kinesthetic, will function more effectively than the other two for the purposes of processing information" (Kaulback, 1984, p.27). The most commonly

accepted and widely publicized Native learning style characteristic is the often reported preference for visual as opposed to verbal and kinesthetic learning. Previous "studies point to the fact that both Indian and Inuit children are most successful at processing visual information and have the most difficulty performing well on tasks saturated with verbal content" (Kaulback, 1984, p.30).

School curricula are generally structured and geared to serve white middle class students. The curriculum content and instructional strategies do not take into account students' cultural backgrounds (Baker, 1983). The cultural belief systems, learning and communication styles, and perceptions of school and education of minority groups are incompatible with Anglo cultures, leading to cultural conflict more particularly cultural detachment, alienation, isolation, and lowered self-esteem in Indian students (Wood and Clay, 1996).

Within ethnographic research reference is made to "Native children learning by observing and imitating the actions of their parents, elders, and older siblings (Kaulback, 1984, p.32). "It is argued that because of early socialization practices, Navajo children place a high value on social relationships with their family and peer group, and that this is a major factor in their orientation of learning" (McInerney and Swisher, 1995, p.43). Communication style is another important aspect of Aboriginal life and has important implications for studying learning styles. The non-verbal communication was much more important than in contemporary Western society. "Silence was also used as a means of

communication. Eye contact and quiet calmness were important methods of discipline and communication" (More, 1989, p. 22). Sawyer (1991) explains that native learners "prefer small group participation, allowance for personal interpretations, a cooperative learning environment, and integrating new information with what they already know" (p.100).

Brown (1980) for example presented evidence of learning styles amongst Cherokee children which are more cooperative and less competitive than their Anglo counterparts. This seemed to produce lower achievement among the Cherokee children. He explained that in Cherokee society, traditional norms called for maintaining harmonious relationships (Swisher, 1991, p.2). "Indian pupils hesitate to engage in an individual performance before the public gaze, especially where they sense competitive assessment against their peers, and equally do not wish to demonstrate by their individual superiority the inferiority of their peers" (Wax, 1971, p.85).

Safran, Safran, and Pirozak (1985) say that, "Considering the dimension of learning styles could have significant positive consequences in schools. Extra opportunities for observational and trial-and-error learning experience could be adapted, which would benefit many Native and non-Native students alike, yield more creative thinkers, and enhance respect for the more global, Native American ecological perspective" (p.56). Education "for indigenous peoples is a natural process that is integrated into the daily lifestyle of the culture. The daily lifestyle

is a cultural process contained within the social unit" (Armstrong, 1989, p.15). Barnhardt in Sawyer (1991) advocates for what he calls 'culturally eclectic' curriculum that can adjust to the realities and world view of the Native student and which uses traditional culture as a basis for examining and adapting to changing conditions (p.102). Barnhardt believes that this curriculum should incorporate four characteristics which are: process centered, community based, utilizes group learning situations, and emphasizes experiential learning. The characteristics presented by Barnhart certainly present a direction for developing a holistic curriculum for Native communities while respecting their unique learning patterns. "This type of education would assist in narrowing the gap of mutual understanding and appreciation of differences between the two cultures" (Chan, 1984, p.61).

Aboriginal Teachers Teaching Aboriginal Students

As I reflect on my own school experience I recall having had only one Native teacher between grade one and university. That one teacher is the person who gave me the incentive to be where I am today. Most Native students do not have a chance to have even one Native teacher. I wanted to see if research had been conducted which looked into this aspect of Aboriginal achievement and learning. Some research says that, "Increasing numbers of aboriginal peoples are teaching in aboriginal classrooms. The assumption is that Aboriginal teachers teach in a way that is more congruent with the sociocultural teaching and learning

patterns of the children in their classes" (McAlpine and Taylor, 1993, p.18). It can be assumed that teachers from the same Native community would be more culturally sensitive to Native students language, customs and values thereby offering a more positive and appropriate learning environment. McAlpine and Taylor (ibid) present a second aspect to consider. That being the effects on aboriginal teachers who are educated in "culturally discontinuous classrooms themselves, both at university and grade school levels that may hinder such teachers from developing culturally based pedagogical practices" (p.1).

Aboriginal teachers may be more culturally sensitive to the needs of native students however their pedagogical interests may remain undefined and difficult to apply. McAlpine and Taylor (ibid) conducted a study on the instructional practices of Cree, Inuit, and Mohawk Teachers. The study was two fold: first it compared Aboriginal teacher preferences to mainstream teacher preferences. Then it looked at similarities among the Aboriginal teachers themselves. The Aboriginal teachers were most similar in the following areas:

1) How children learn best- They believed that Native children learn best by talking with other children.
2) How teachers teach best- The Aboriginal teachers said that letting children learn from each other was best. Showing children how to do things was the second. While telling then how and working alone was less favorable.
3) Ways of maintaining Control in the Classroom- Aboriginal teachers believed

that setting up routines for children to follow was important. Secondly they believed that talking quietly to students was important. Punctuality, punishment, and showing you were boss as the teacher were less favorable responses.

4) Role of the School in Developing Mainstream and Aboriginal Language- Aboriginal teachers believed that aboriginal language and literacy was important

5) Teacher Typologies- Aboriginal teachers had a preference for reading, writing, speaking activities.

In summarizing all the literature on Aboriginal student achievement I was disappointed that there was limited research on the effects of band controlled schooling as they apply to student achievement. Hopefully this can be a topic for future research. Review of the literature did however give me keen insights into the relevance of culture, learning styles, self esteem, and teacher differences and made me even more anxious to begin my own research.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The First Nations Education Graduate Program at the University of Alberta provided a well rounded foundation in preparing me to become a First Nations researcher. As I struggled to find the means of presenting and analyzing the data in the context and voice it was given I had to rely on many aspects of the program, most particularly on three courses and a conference hosted by the program. Each of these courses were taught by Indigenous scholars from both Canada and the US. My graduate school experience would become something I did not expect. Each of these professors would awaken something that was never acknowledged in all the past years of my formal training. In the first course I had opportunity to awaken thoughts that were suddenly acknowledged. It was difficult to define it then as it was my first course in the program but soon I would make sense of the experience. That sense-making did come later that spring. I took the two most insightful courses to all my formal years of schooling during the spring session. The first was Indigenous Research Methodologies and the second Revitalizing Indigenous Languages.

The first course, Indigenous Research Methodologies[3], is one that helped inspire both the collection and the data analysis of this study. In this course each of the class participants was required to explore ways in which our Indigenous

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[3] Educational Policy Studies 601 taught by Alexandria Wilson, Cree from the Opaskwayak First Nation in Manitoba. This intersession spring course at the University of Alberta was offered May 1998.

forefathers researched information. As part of the course requirements we were asked to select a living object and spend an hour each day with that object for the remainder of the week. I chose a tree as my object and later I would see the significance of the assignment.

The second course[4] offered by an elder, Dr. Lionel Kinuwa, did not look specifically at one language or language group but rather focused on the importance of language and how much wisdom is found within the language. He taught that language lives and is carried on by what he termed *cellular knowledge* from one generation to the next. By the end of the course I would find myself seeing the world as it exists from a whole rather than as different compartments as I have always been taught in formal schooling.

The Tree

The tree I chose has much significance to the research study I carried out. I recall when trying to decide in the course what living object I wanted to use as my assignment that I wanted something that was symbolic. I let the selection process be as natural as possible. I walked around for a long while and suddenly felt that particular plant, that tree would be the object I would select.

When looking at the process as it unfolded for that course, I now saw this same process happen once again for the analysis of this study. I had selected the

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[4] Educational Policy Studies 601 Course title "Revitalizating Indigenous Languages" taught by Lionel Kinawa, Minieunjo Sioux from the Rosebud Reservation in North Dakota. This intersession spring course at the University of Alberta was offered in May 1998.

tree. It appeared at first simply as a part of nature and quite pretty. I had not known much about the type of tree it was, but over the week, I learned many great things about it. By the end I discovered it had become a significant part of me. I had discovered my relationship to nature and to the beauty I had overlooked for so long. I became reliant on the tree to provide me with a feeling of security and calmness. I realized many important aspects: that it was there for a long time and it grew to be of such beauty and size that I wondered how others did not see the beauty I now saw. How very important this symbolism became as I progressed through my research.

When I sat in close proximity to the tree for the first time I felt uncomfortable, hoping others near me would not realize that I was studying this tree. In my discomfort the first time I wrote down thoughts and feelings of that initial visit. By the third and fourth visit I looked forward to going to see and be with the tree. I had given it a name and realized that a bond was created. I now studied this tree with much more pride. I studied each of the five trunks taking note of all the physical attributes; of its marks, causing me to think of how much pain it had endured over the years. Each of the green leaves on it swayed so beautifully in a soft breeze, dancing to a slow rhythm. I would touch the trunk each time I visited it, greeting it with thankfulness for the contentment it brought me. By the end of the course I discovered that I did not visit the tree just to study it but rather, I began seeing the wholeness I had forgotten or had not yet

discovered in my formal learning experiences. Since we were studying Indigenous Research methodologies, the time spent with the tree granted me, time to reflect with little concern for time and with no anxiety. I was left with a feeling of true contentment. The tree reminded me of Elders in my community. I could see them existing in many parts and aspects of my life and surroundings. I learned to take notice and appreciate those kinds of riches around me and wanted not to overlook or take them for granted.

Bridging the Gap

I felt then a need to bridge the wide gap that I sensed between Indigenous teachings and methodologies and the western philosophies espoused in most university methodology classes. In some small way, I wanted to honour both. This compromise has come through borrowing tools from the Western traditions. These tools (more specifically ethnographic interviewing and observing) did afford me this opportunity. They became invaluable helpers, however I never let my belief nor my allegiance to an Indigenous process waiver. Because I used western ethnographic tools my study can be said to be qualitative.

Study Design

The shift in paradigms that I make here is indicative of the horrendous difference between an Indigenous worldview and a western philosophy and my difficulty with operating in both. Nevertheless I believe that: "Qualitative research methods are useful in understanding how individuals understand their

world, in showing how individuals' perceptions and intentions in situations determine their behavior, in exploring phenomena to find explanations, and in providing concrete detailed illustrations of phenomena" (Kathwohl, 1998, p.225). The study utilized the ethnographic tools of interviewing and observing as described by Spradley (1979; 1980). A focus group, more particularly the research/talking circle, was used also as part of the data collection procedure. Wilson and Wilson (in press) explain the research circle as a tool that embraces the traditional values of respect, care and non-interference in research work.

Data Gathering Procedures: Research Circles

Six students along with their parents were invited to the first circle. They were asked to complete a consent form before the initial work began. The talking circle is a tool used within the traditional Indian culture as a means of coming together, collaborating and sharing ideas (Wilson and Wilson, in press). The circle follows certain protocol that I explained to the students at the first research circle gathering. A gift of tobacco was given to each participant at the onset of the circle. The gift acknowledged the appreciation for the knowledge each informant would be contributing to the study. The circle was used twice as part of the procedure. The initial circle set the stage for the collection procedure where expectations and rules were shared and rapport was established. The goals of the research were set out. A final circle was convened to close the data collection process.

As each circle progressed, I audio taped the proceedings. Following each circle, I began the difficult task of transcribing. In order then to expand upon particular comments made by individuals within the circle, I set up an interview schedule.

Data Gathering Procedures: Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview lasted for approximately one and one-half hours and I met with each participant two times. I attempted to follow Spradley's (1979) advice by using descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. For instance, as a descriptive question I asked more of a grand tour question like "Tell me about your educational experience from as far back you would like to begin up to the present." As informants raised issues about their educational experience I made note to return to that topic once they felt they completed the descriptive question. I quickly reviewed each point and would decide the approach I would use to structure the next parts of the interview. I used structural questions to compliment the descriptive questions of the interview. An example of a structural question I used was: "Earlier you spoke of feeling not part of the group and that you felt 'dumb' can you tell me more?" These types of questions helped lead into issues raised by students. I also used contrast questions. An example of a contrast question I used was: "Do you feel that if you attended an off reserve school you would feel better prepared for college or university?" Or another type

"If you did not attend this school all of your life do you think you would be doing as well as you are academically?" Sometimes I asked all three types of questions at other times this was not necessary.

I then triangulated much of the information that I had gathered in the research/talking circles and in the interviews by making community observations. I took extensive field notes during the entire process.

The Participants

I chose six students as key informants for this study. The students were selected from the school population and were chosen on the basis of six criterion; age, gender, place of residence, school currently attending, attendance in regular stream school program. I also considered those who were recommended by teachers and school authorities. Participants were all between the ages of 13 and 17 years. As well a gender balanced group of females and males within this age range was invited to participate. Each participant was required to have resided in the community for the past five years. Each participant was to have attended the reserve school for the past five years. Being intimately acquainted with the community through my own extended family kinship ties meant that I also knew of students that would be appropriate participants.

Data Analysis

Since the data is qualitative in nature I used a theme analysis. Data were gathered then synthesized to find generalizations (McMillan, 1996). Reflective

field notes on observations, descriptions, interactions with participants, my emotional reactions were reviewed along with interview transcriptions from my key informants. I also considered secondary information from teachers, family members, and school authorities to find common themes that emerged from the data.

I used large chart paper on the walls - dividing it into specific themes. I then cut and pasted quotes from students that fit under these themes. At this point I was able to note the number of times that students had returned to a particular issue. For instance I noted that all students in the study mentioned that drugs and alcohol were a problem which affected their achievement either directly or indirectly.

Anonymity, Accuracy, and Ethical Considerations

The Chief and Council were solicited for approval to carry out the study on the reserve. A letter explaining the study was presented to them. I told them that I would present them with a final report of the research upon it's completion.

I gave each participant a pseudonym which was culturally appropriate for the student and the community. I created composite vignettes of each participant, scrambling the information, facts and experiences of the participants so as to further conceal individual identities. I promised to share my completed thesis with all those who had taken part.

Participants included in the study were reminded at each interview

meeting of the right to withdraw themselves from the study for whatever reason. Anonymity of each participant was again ensured. These conditions were included in a letter of consent for both the participant and parent (or guardian) of the participant.

The Setting for My Study

Pohkweteh First Nation is located 365 km from the largest urban center in the province. The community is made up of marginal land unsuitable for the most part to farming, forestry, or agricultural production. Most residents rely on a nearby sawmill for their economic sustenance. As well the community possess a small commercial gravel enterprise.

The community is governed by a Chief and eight elected councillors. Elections are held every three years. Some residents of Pohkweteh First Nation maintain fulltime jobs at the school, local government office, in the extended senior care home, and recovery center. Many residents rely solely on their monthly social assistance cheques.

Pohkweteh First Nation has a population of approximately 2300 with the majority under the age of 25 years. Increasingly the young people of Pohkweteh are realizing the importance of education. Ten years ago the band assumed control over its educational system. They have built their own elementary, junior high, and senior high school. A nearby community college offers teacher education programs. A number of local young people have trained as teachers

and now up to 40% of the teachers in the community are Aboriginal.

Pohkweteh has a village center where most of the buildings are located; the school, band offices, fire hall, wellness center, and recovery center. Surrounding this nucleus is a number of scattered houses. Houses are usually three bedroom self contained units. Houses outside the townsite are serviced by weekly water delivery. Like most First Nations communities in Western Canada there is a major housing shortage.

Pohkweteh First Nation relies on a neighbouring community for medical services although a nurse and a psychologist visit the community on a regular basis. Pohkweteh lies within a 40 mile radius of a number of small rural farming villages. There is little planned leisure activity for the community. Few adults initiate activity for the youth of the community. Young people travel outside the community to these small villages for much of their recreational stimulation.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

"We see the world through the vail of our culture...intellect doesn't clear our eyes."
Kinuwa, 1999

Analyzing the Process

The struggle surfaced once again as I began presenting and analyzing the data for this thesis. Most of the struggles have been at a personal level, many times leaving me at a loss. The struggle focused on how could the data be presented in the light it was given? As explained by Wilson and Wilson (1998) many Aboriginal researchers struggle when articulating their findings to an academic audience because the data might create moral dilemmas and difficulty within the Aboriginal Community. Most of the findings in my study support previous literature on the topic. However there still was something that needed to be said and I just was not sure how to articulate it and wondered if it was even possible to do so. Although my initial intent was to find the factors that affected academic achievement in reserve schools, I found myself confronted by a larger obstacle: that of expressing the whole picture without the focus being presented as the one key issue that would solve all problems on this reserve. It was here I found myself at a loss. I felt I had no option other than echoing the literature and perhaps presenting some new findings unique to the individuals involved in the study. But something was still missing.....

I completed each interview and experienced much positive emotion and comfort. It was this emotion that continued to create discontent for me in presenting the analysis. The struggle lay in how such resilient young people who feel they lead a basically happy life at the reserve and are filled with many dreams could be presented in that light. For anyone else, I knew their situation would have looked grim. After much searching and hope to find a way to present the data I realized that it needed to be presented as a whole. At the Indigenous Scholars Conference held at the University of Alberta in the spring of 1999 a presenter expressed insightful information which would lead me to give thought and hope to the study's completion. The presenter, Dr. Manu Meyer, (in press) explained how self esteem, as defined by western psychology standards, has no application to how her Hawaiian People experienced and defined self esteem. The Western applications could not be applied to her people as cultural norms and social roles were evaluated as a whole rather than individually. Her presentation made me realize that I perhaps was doing just that; defining the undefinable in a way it really could not be defined.

When I analyzed my data using a theme analysis six major topics emerged. I then sat wondering if that was the end all to the study. I felt uncertain that this could be the final picture and hoped for insight to better explain something I felt I was not capable of expressing. I still felt that the themes were not the end of the research but the beginning of what I needed and hoped to explain.

When I studied the data once again, like my visits to the tree, I soon realized that the tree was a true representation of the process. I had selected six students and discovered that they together were a part of something that was whole. They come from the same place and endure similar experiences. As a whole they experience the hurts together and the triumphs together. A foundational history supports their growth as they branch off to new places. One informant explained that "you're given two willows, one crooked and one straight one, its up to you to choose which one you want." The significance of his analogy would help in making me understand that individually they were part of something whole.

I attempted to lay the data out in a fashion that would embody the feel of the informants and the emotion and understanding I felt as a researcher. Ross (1992) expresses a similar struggle in presenting the findings of Native people he studied. He expresses his difficulty in locating a beginning or end to describing his findings. He explains that the difficulty in the "inter-connectedness of every part which makes a complete description of any one part in isolation is an impossible task" (p. xxvi). "Not only was the whole greater than the sum of it's parts; none of the parts could be fully understood without the whole" (p. xxvi). I decided to present the information in its totality rather than presenting then analyzing it. The findings would be dismantled for the purpose of the study and brought back together to complete the larger picture I hoped to achieve.

Kinuwa asserts that "we see the world through the vail of our culture...intellect doesn't clear our eyes" (In press). I feel that since I have been granted the emic perspective of being an insider I could interpret the data at a deeper understanding level. It is therefore understandable for these reasons that I experienced high emotion with the privilege of understanding each informant. Further to this understanding came the epistemic privilege of "having the ability to see in two worlds" (Wilson, in press). The more I began to understand my own worth within the cultural process the more I was able to understand what the students were saying. I therefore can only offer those experiences I have come to experience within my culture. Having it become definitive and concrete is not possible. Ross (1992) says that "until you understand that your own culture dictates how you translate everything you see and hear, you will never be able to see or hear things in any other way." With this understanding of myself, I progressed through the study.

The Composite Vignettes: The Leaves on the Tree

In keeping with my affinity to *my* tree, I now think of the informants of this study as fresh new leaves that branch and grow from the tree.

Andy

Andy is an athletic and outgoing fourteen year old. He is the middle child in a family of three. He lives at home with his parents and two bothers. Both his parents are employed and are active members of the reserve community. Andy

and the rest of his family participate in a variety of cultural activities together as a unit. He has also had the fortune of living near his grandparents all his life. He credits his grandparents for the traditions he and his family practice. Andy excels in athletics and competes in most everything he can. He is as an above average student and is regarded as a very bright and conscientious student. Andy has lived on the reserve all of his life and has always attended reserve schools. He is a mature and respectful young man.

Nicole

Nicole is sixteen years old. She is the middle child in a family of three children. Nicole and her younger brother have always lived with her mother until last year. Her oldest brother, who lives with his girlfriend, is now Nicole and her brother's guardian. Her oldest brother was raised by his grandparents and moved out soon after to care for his younger siblings. Nicole spent the three years of her elementary schooling with her brother and mother in another community however she has spent the majority of her life living on the reserve. She has attended the reserve schools but while away in elementary school she attended an off reserve school. Nicole has enjoyed athletics throughout her school years participating in her passion of running. Academically Nicole is average to above average. Her teachers regard her as a good student who applies great effort to her studies and tasks.

Sheila

Sheila is a shy, soft spoken thirteen year old. Both her parents and her two siblings moved from the reserve for a two year period up until she was eight years old. She has lived the majority of her life on the reserve and has attended both on and off reserve schools spending the majority of her school years on reserve. Sheila's oldest sister has three children and a common law husband who live at the same home with Sheila and her older brother. Her father resides with his new wife on another part of the reserve since the divorce of her parents three years ago. Sheila's mother has since moved back to her original reserve community. Her mother has maintained close contact with each of her siblings and visits them regularly. Sheila relies on her father for most of her needs and he has been very diligent in providing her with all she needs. Sheila has attended the reserve school for the majority of her school years and prefers the reserve school over the nearby off reserve schools. Sheila is a good student and is regarded as an enjoyable young lady who is a pleasure to teach by many of her teachers.

Joel

Joel is fifteen years old. He is the second oldest in a family of four children. His mother is currently living in another community. Joel's oldest sister, who is 22 years old, has guardianship of him and his younger brother and sister. His mother, who raised each of the siblings on her own, completed an

alcohol and drug rehabilitation program in a nearby reserve. He has lived on the reserve for all of his life and has attended the community school for the majority of his formal schooling. In the past Joel has attended school in the nearby town. Joel enjoys attending community events more particularly dances and teen functions that the community hosts. He finds difficulty in finding transportation as he lives away from the community center and requires a ride to go places. Joel enjoys many sports offered by the school especially basketball. He is an average student who feels he can do better. His teachers regard him as a good student.

Tyler

Tyler is seventeen years old. He is the second youngest in a family of four children. As a young child Tyler and his two older sisters and brother lived in foster care for the first eight years of his life. Tyler lived in two foster homes on the reserve for most of the eight years. His mother, who is confined to a wheel chair due to an accident, now leads a very independent life and is determined in providing the necessities for each her children. His mother regained custody of all four children and has raised them alone since. He recalls being happy to be back living with his mother. Tyler has lived in the city for part of his elementary school year and moved back to the city a year while in junior high. Although he lived in the city and attended school for a total of five years his ties to the reserve were maintained by frequent visits to family on the reserve. Academically Tyler is above average and is regarded as a hardworking student. In the past Tyler has

had a summer job that granted some financial freedom however during the year he is reliant on his mother to provide for him.

Leanne

Leanne is a pleasant, young fifteen year old lady. She is an only child who was raised by her mother since birth. Leanne has lived on the reserve all of her life and has always attended the reserve community school. Her leadership qualities and trust in her traditional practices encourage Leanne to participate in as many community and school events. Leanne is an average student who is especially appreciated by her teachers. Staff at school regard her as a great leader and ambassador for the school. She is kept very busy with her after school part time job. She is involved in almost all events and most athletics at the school. Leanne keeps herself very busy and will find something to maintain that pace. She is well known by many members of the community and can be found at almost every event in the community either lending a helping hand or just supporting others.

Now that you know the students who took part in the study you will better understand their responses as they speak in the following themes.

The Themes of the Study

The Issue of Racism

As students began to retell their educational history five of the six students made reference to the racism they encountered in their early years of school.

Although two of the students have never attended off reserve schools they both offered their experiences of racism. Each of the informants had a story to tell unique to each of their lives. The different experiences were felt as early wounds. Informants revisited memories of their initial school experiences and the racism that occurred both then and in their later years.

Tyler recalls his initial years as difficult ones. He was a gifted child in a classroom of gifted children. Teachers ignored him because he says "Indians weren't supposed to be that way. They couldn't accept that an Indian kid could be gifted." He describes how he was neglected and left on his own while the teachers spent their time working with the other kids. He believes that perhaps this was a fault of the entire school system for not believing that Indian children could compete in mainstream standards. He continues to make clear his point by saying "Thats kinda how they made me feel, like...it was subtle but I could sense the subtleties." As he continued with his explanation Tyler continued to rationalize their actions: "It was probably something that they could not accept or something that was absolutely new to them...I wanted to be there but they tried to make me feel like I should be somewhere else." Although this was a difficult time for Tyler he felt that the non acceptance of his ability was a "driving force." As I spoke with Tyler I was amazed at his resiliency; his ability to turn negative situations into positive driving forces. He feels that same drive today.

Tyler soon found a place that would not wear down the drive seen during

those first years of school. He resents not having been seen as the individual he felt he was. When he returned home and attended the reserve school for the first time he felt he found "something better....people weren't looking at me because of my intellectual abilities but aside from that my other characteristics as a person....leadership qualities and stuff...[Pohkweteh School] respect those kind of things." Tyler continues that the reserve school is "someplace where I was accepted...acceptance for who I am like, who Tyler Lighting is...I didn't have problems adjusting at all." Since the reserve school gave Tyler opportunity to feel growth and recognition of his identity he chose to attend Native schools even when he was back in the city for a year.

Nicole recalls that in grade five she was sent to an off reserve school in the nearby town. "I just felt real different cause the teacher made me feel down...I felt like I was real stupid." She makes reference to being very shy as a result of this adjustment. She recalls "I just felt shy because they were white people." Her lower grades reflected her feeling of being in the new setting. For Nicole the feeling of acceptance by an authority figure was important. Her peer group was less important as her focus was on trying to gain acceptance by her teacher.

Tyler and Nicole's experiences were similar in that they felt inferior as a direct result of the treatment of teachers. Tyler moved to a reserve school to find acceptance. Both students found the on reserve school to be more understanding of their individualism. The growth fostered by the reserve school has given them

confidence to take on new challenges and in Nicole's case the renewed confidence and ability to survive in any school.

For Joel the experience was more peer related but it still centered around racism. Joel recalls when he first attended an off reserve school in a smaller nearby town "they [other students] didn't know my name so they kept calling me 'Indian boy' I didn't talk to them, they didn't talk to me." This incident was just one example of the treatment he received. Joel has internalized the racism to the extent that he now portrays the same racist actions as were foisted on him:

> I think Indians hang around with Indians and white people hang around with other white people....I think its racism cause I know there are kids in town that do that kind of stuff...once in a while I see white people acting like they have it all so they go act good in front of Indians....already when I just look at him [a white peer in town] I know he is a real ignorant person that he doesn't care like he wants to fight all the time.

For Joel racism equates to violence something he has learned to stay away from. In his explanation though he cites a situation just the previous year that made him feel the need to fight back. He explains how it occurred as he and others went to represent the reserve school at a cross-country run. A number of schools participate, two reserve schools and at least four town schools.

> When we went to the cross-country last year some of them [white students] in the bus beside us kept bugging us they kept throwing things in there [his bus] apples...bananas..finally I grabbed one of those bananas they threw and I just hit their bus driver...they kept bugging us for some reason...we were waiting to go and all of a sudden that one guy stuck his head out the window and threw a banana at me. I got hit in the back and had to clean it off. We had the windows all open and they just kept throwing bananas...

When asked where were supervisors or other teachers he replied "they wouldn't do anything anyways." Joel realizes the treatment that he received that day was one that he would face again. His feeling that he is left alone to deal with the situation is one that many learn to cope with.

The shield of the reserve school does not protect students from encountering racism. Both Andy and Leanne have attended on reserve schools for all their school years. Andy has little recollection of his initial years of school. His experiences with racism are recent and more evident today in after school and extra curricular activity. Although Leanne has also always attended the community reserve school she feels that she has been a victim of racism and realizes its existence. Both Andy and Leanne express feelings of how Indian people are thought to be "dirty" people who are of little or no value to the mainstream society.

Andy presents some of the many stereotypes that are held about Indians. He explains how white people can "make you feel like a dirty rag." When asked where he encounters these feelings he draws on recent events to make his point "you basically see it a lot in sports for one thing...like right now from refs [and] other players their racial slurs..." Andy makes reference to a tournament he and his team are hosting that weekend. He points out the unfairness of the visiting hired officials for the tournament. "It pisses me off if you know that if you say something you will get a technical foul...we know we have no fans to come out

and cheer us on and yell at the refs....its just like in the court system we have no fans." Andy speaks briefly about the injustices of the court system and then compares the same treatment, which he believes to be racially motivated, to situations he is forced to face in extra curricular sports in school. He continues to explain that "[for] years back it's always been like that...something that ain't gonna stop....it still happens now." Being at home gives no insurance that Andy is safe from the mistreatment of racism. He makes reference to the weekend tournament "it was seven on five throughout the whole tournament even though it was on our home turf." It is upsetting to Andy that racism has no boundary and shows up in unexpected places and most specifically at home on the reserve. Andy, like Joel, believes that there is little that can been done. Like Joel, Andy explains he must "basically cope with it like just block it out." Andy draws on his teachings from his grand parents explaining "well how I was taught was if someone is putting racial slurs on a different culture they're only putting it on themselves." I ask Andy do you think racism will always exist? He responds "uh huh." Both Andy and Joel have come to understand and are prepared themselves for racism to be a part of their everyday experience. Andy's comparison to the court system gives light to the everyday crime of being in a powerless position against the acceptable crime of racism. As a young man he is forced to accept this reality if he is not to bring harm to himself.

Although Leanne does not mention racism in sports she makes reference to

one day attending school with her cousin in the nearby town:

> white people they [pause] they can be racist to us like they can [pause] they think we are all dirty and everything that's how I feel and like [pause] I went to go visit at my cousins school when I was in grade six....she took me to school so I went to go visit there and I don't know I had these clothes on, my cousins clothes, and everybody else was just looking at me like what are you doing here? Looking at me like that and they were real racist to me I didn't like it so I just told her I didn't want to be there she just said it's only half a day so I just stuck it out...some of these girls didn't even know me and they would look at me 'Look at that Indian' or something like that 'go back to your teepee' or something. So I said I don't want to stay here.

The stereotypes of the teepee and the nomadic lifestyle of Leanne's ancestors which she has been taught are part of her rich heritage are laced with the stigma of being dirty and uncivilized. So Leanne copes by staying in the comfortable surroundings of Pohkweteh. She speaks of how much she enjoys the comfort and familiarity of her reserve school. When she speaks of her home community her face brightens with a smile as she says "then when I am here everyone just gives you a smile or something." For Leanne the reception she received in the off reserve school has made her sensitive to other kids. She is an ambassador at her reserve school and explains to me how she likes to make shy peers and visitors to the school feel part of the school community. She welcomes friends and visitors to the school regardless of race, age, or gender. She explains her plan for avoiding racism in the future, more particular when she leaves the reserve to attend university in the city. She feels that her road to success has been paved by others and explains that she will survive university "if there are Indians there I

won't feel that way...now that I know that some Indians are going to university and not dropping out of school I want to be like that." Leanne does not see herself as a survivor but rather she is filled with hopes and dreams.

Racism to each of these young people has made its mark early in their school experience. A large part of why they attend the reserve school is not having to face racism on a daily basis. In their own way, each has learned how to cope. Tyler recounts the situation on his bus ride home while attending a Native school in the city:

> Whenever I would catch the bus there would always be this group of white boys that would try and start trouble just because I guess you could say hate, racism, prejudice, discrimination throw em all in and I guess that's what was happening but I kinda looked past it and why should I hate back.

Although Tyler has endured the whole gamut of hate he triumphs in knowing that the strength in his individualism powered by the pride of his heritage is far greater than the small challenge of other young boys on the bus.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is a problem for each of the informants in varying degrees. The informants live in a tightly knit community where most are either related or hold standards of expectations of others in their peer group. Since the school community is close knit the entire reserve is an extension of the everyday social world of the community. Because each of the informants reside and attend school on the reserve there is the added pressure of conforming to their social group and the larger group on the reserve. This pressure often leads to problems with drugs

and alcohol.

Sheila presents her understanding of peer pressure. She explains to me that there are common patterns that young people fall into. She says "everybody smoked, so I had to." Since the reserve school permits those students who have parental permission to smoke on designated school property this heightens pressure and creates temptation for students to partake in smoking. Andy confirms this "just about everyone smokes" meaning peers and people in the community. He adds "it's a form of peer pressure. I went through it." Sheila feels that inevitably this leads to more activity with drugs and alcohol. She explains "me and my friends started doing drugs in grade seven." As a result it affected the remainder of that junior high year. My observations of the entire student population confirmed what the students had said. At every break and after school I noticed large numbers exit the school to smoke in the designated area. I realized that smoking was part of the school routine. It was part of a social activity accompanied by visiting, laughing, and sharing news with one another; much like adults at community reserve functions.

Leanne found peer pressure to heightened in junior high although there were similar pressures in elementary school. She feels that the peer pressure in elementary school was more petty with smoking being the major issue. In junior high the pressure escalates to a level that presents her with many difficulties where difficult choices need to be made. "Peer pressure, drugs and alcohol and

like if you hang around with the cool group and they're like doing drugs and everything...and you want to be just like them and you just go for it, and then after lets say they're hooting up during lunch hour and you want them to think you're real cool and everything [pause] you'll just take it." She explains this difficulty to be troublesome and regrets it for the most part. She continues:

> I got peer pressured into doing marijuana and I really didn't want to do it...But she [a long time friend] told me that if we're not doing it we're not gonna talk as much. We grew up together too we have pictures of when we were little too cause her dad and my dad used to be friends.

The problem for Leanne is a difficult one, tied to the fact their fathers are friends. Maintaining that tie is one that Leanne felt a need to maintain. She explains that as a young child pressure from that same friend was present. "We were only like seven or eight and she pulled out a pack of cigarettes. I just grabbed them and threw them. I just told her don't do that." For her as a young child she explains how much easier it was for her to withdraw herself. In junior high the situation became more complex as she became a younger adult in a world that now ties her to the adult community.

Peer pressure comes in many masks with the underlying understanding that each of the adolescents has jeopardized something in order to conform. Nicole recalls how her encounters with the pressure among her peers and basically the standards defined by her social group affected her academically and eventually socially. "All my friends party...all my friends were doing it [marijuana] and I didn't want to do it cause I didn't know how I would feel, how I

would react but I just tried it out. I just kept doing it and doing it till I got kicked out of school." She explains how the social group fueled the pressure.

> I was going out with this guy he was really into partying and drugs. My mom didn't like him at all cause he was a really really bad influence on me...his friends would pressure him to go partying and would say lets go get Nicole and then my friends would go with their friends. I don't know it seemed like that was the 'in' thing to do. Everybody was doing it so you had to do it too.

For Nicole the importance of being with her friends and maintaining that specific group connection would cost her schooling and later cause her depression. She continues "right after me and that guy split up...my friends freaked out on me." Nicole continued to explain how when she returned to school she maintained the social group as there are few numbers of teens on the reserve. She was teased about her new attitude towards school following her year away. She mentioned names such as "school girl" making reference to be a "goody goody." She managed to overcome the teasing and maintain her social group and feels pride in that others now see how well she has done for herself.

The informants each explain bouts with peer pressure. Andy manages to set the stage for the others. "I don't mind it that much [living on the reserve] it's just...how do I say it...peer pressure it's real hard on students." Andy feels that peer pressure is one of the larger contributing factors to student success. Andy explains that in previous years "it [peer pressure] was just harder like there was a lot more students back then there was what 340 to 350 kids." The larger group created problems as the pressure was stronger with the diversity found within the

higher numbers of students. He explains how some students avoid school at all costs when they are involved in conflict or when pressure to be involved in activity such as drugs become too great. He ends with stating "but I figure now it's starting to change now that more and more kids ain't using drugs." The peer pressure and the bullying and violence that is sometimes used to force others to conform or as an act to push away peers from the larger social group in time will change. At least this is the hope that most of the students carry. They see themselves working through this stage and as a result becoming better adjusted people.

Tyler claims peer pressure to be a problem for others at school. He explains that "peer pressure looks at me, I stare it down in the eyes." He feels that his social group share similar values and "they have better things coming for them so do I" he explains. He adds "sure I have a few friends that do that, like drugs and alcohol whatever, but when they were to pressure me I just keep saying nope, and if they keep pressuring me and pressuring me I just say I ain't gonna be friends with you cause your doing this to me...I give people a shot [a chance] like me it comes down to respect and that's disrespecting if you're getting nagged all the time." Andy explains his involvement with a mediation group and happily claims that he is "learning to deal with peer pressure and how to help others deal with the pressure." Both these individuals realize that there are ways to deal with pressure.

Drugs and Alcohol

It is difficult to disconnect the themes of peer pressure and drugs and find the division between them as most peer pressure presented involved drugs and alcohol. When I think back to the tree I feel the analogy to be fitting in presenting the two topics. Each of the informants present stories of peer pressure however they combine their stories to explain their experiences with drugs and/or alcohol. Each of the students share a story about their experiences with drugs and/or alcohol as explained in the peer pressure topic. They each either share first hand knowledge or an experience of someone close to them.

Tyler explains "well it starts with smoking like in grade 5 or grade 6, then it leads to drugs and alcohol in junior high, then who knows what in high school...Some people think they are doing it just to have a good time...Sometimes one thing leads to another. Some people drop out because of drugs or alcohol." Each of the informants present drugs and alcohol in this similar light.

Each informant attributes drugs and alcohol to be a factor that affects academic achievement. When I asked Joel what he thought was one of the biggest problems students face he responded "probably just drugs or alcohol...they're [students involved in drugs and alcohol] probably too busy trying to get it everyday...they'd rather be getting drunk than learning..." I asked if he meant the problem of drugs and alcohol exist in school he responds in a agreeable nod and says "yup."

Nicole shares her experience with drugs and school, resulting in getting "kicked out" of school. She explains the experience as she sees it for most everyone who comes to the junior high or transfers from other schools. "When you first come to school here and you don't do it [drugs] you will get pressured to do it..." She explains that two years ago she and her friends smoked marijuana frequently at school. She felt that most everyone seems to do it anyway especially at school. She remembers how it felt when others teased them for "coming to class high". She said that "the boys would always say how come your eyes are so red? Or are you stoned?...right in front of the teacher." After speaking to Nicole further in regards to being teased I got the feeling that she didn't mind the teasing too much rather it included her as part of the group that took part in smoking marijuana. I also felt that for Nicole it appeared to be that most everyone else in school used marijuana also.

Drugs had been an extreme problem in the school up until a short time ago. Nicole explains "there used to be a lot of drug dealing going on in school...there were about seven dealers a day in school...now nobody [deals]...are students are just too scared to come to school. Everybody is just trying to go to work....They always say 'I don't want the junior high [students] to catch up to me' like their little cousins and sisters and brothers." Nicole feels that it's a shared attitude among her peers. In the past there has been many examples of siblings catching up and/or completing high school before their older siblings.

Each of the informants express their relief that the pressures to take drugs and alcohol has lessened in the last few years. Sheila claims that drugs and alcohol have become less of a problem. She says school is an easier place to be now "cause some hardly do it [drugs] they choose not to do it". Joel explains "to me it feels like it's getting less [drug use in school] cause people are getting sick of it...sick of getting high all day." Andy explains that there are "the rare ones that want to stay home to do drugs, watch tv, watch their soap operas...There are people here who do that." For many teens this is not a desirable situation. Being at home with little to do isolates youth from the community and their peers. Leanne made comment that school is an enjoyable place for her. She explains "its boring if you don't go to school. You're home alone."

Teen Pregnancy

Teen Pregnancy is a real issue for many of the informants. They each have a relative that has been faced with the issue of teen pregnancy. Tyler explains that although teen pregnancy is not a shocking issue it can be when it "just pops its ugly head out of no where." He explains teen pregnancy is known and "yeah it happens." Joel feels that teen pregnancy affects many teens on the reserve "I think about half the reserve around there." Sheila realizes the extent of teen pregnancy and feels that "they're [teens her peers] not responsible enough" Joel explains "I don't know I just freak out [when I hear of a teen pregnancy] they don't know what they are doing." The informants have a keen sense of the effects

and reality of teen pregnancy on the reserve.

As the informants present teen pregnancy as a problem that affects Aboriginal student success they present their own personal stories of relatives and freinds and how teen pregnancy affected them. Nicole feels overwhelmed as most of her friends have become pregnant

> I freaked out on that cause all of like in junior high were saying 'oh I'm not gonna have kids till I am over 20' and the summer came and...uh...she's pregnant now Sandra is pregnant now. I just freaked out on that cause she wasn't really into going out with guys...everybody thought I was gonna get pregnant..its not my goal to get pregnant.

Sheila shares her cousin's story, "my cousin is one of them. She has three kids at 20. I feel sorry for her." Joel's sister became pregnant when she was in grade 11. "She was doing good until she went with Robert...they have two kids now." Still some of the informants themselves are children born to their parents when they were teenagers. It is an issue that has been for sometime.

As the informants present teen pregnancy as an issue they identify the consequences it has on the young people of the community. Tyler begins by claiming teen pregnancy to be negative. He says "yes it's negative because sometimes it happens to those people that actually want to finish [school]. Like when they are sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen and this slows them down maybe five years...it changes their lives completely." The responsibility of children becomes too great for most young parents. Sheila explains that "they can't come [to school] anymore" as their new baby becomes priority. Nicole feels that for

some young girls they have a glorified image of being a parent and sometimes they are searching for love and a way to reach a maturity or level of status. She feels that girls should be educated on the issue: "how it's gonna affect their lives when they're older. Like they're gonna be having a baby on their side...they probably never were told what's gonna happen in their lives with the kid...most parents are single they really don't know what to do...cause they stay home and watch their kids. They don't have schooling..." Joel claims that teen pregnancy "causes confusion" for those involved. They are faced with life long choices that require sacrifice in a young person's life. He simply adds "cause they don't know why they did it".

Teen pregnancy although realized by each of the informants is also in many ways accepted by each of them as a community norm. Nicole speaks about the long term affects for her and her future children. " I feel left out...even though I don't want kids like I just...I don't know...a couple months ago I was thinking I should just go and get pregnant and I wouldn't feel this way but then I don't want to." She is pained by having to maintain her lonely decision to finish school. There is little reinforcement in her social group as she explains only one of her friends is childless. She explains that she is caught in a situation where either way she feels she will lose. "When I have a kid like when I am in my 20's, they're [her friends] kid's will be real old and my kids will be real young and like my kid won't have friends to play with...my cousin got pregnant her boy will be

real big and my kid will be real small." The pull to conform is ever present.

There is much to consider for someone like Nicole. In her interview she points out other aspects that she realizes become problematic for young teen couples as they sometimes try to maintain a young carefree lifestyle. She considers some situations and relationships on the reserve. "Some of the relationships aren't that great. Like they [young parents] go out partying and leave the kid to a babysitter or come back real late...they don't really care for the baby's feelings..." She brings up another issue of guys and girls. She feels that guys don't have to go through the same things girls do. "They get to do whatever...a guy has three girls pregnant right now...and it's no problem." Nicole feels that only some guys carry this kind of attitude. She feels that many younger couples now commit to one another and are in fact together. Her friend Carrie, who is expecting her first child this winter, is content living with her boyfriend at her parents home. Nicole explains that Carrie "is happy she's still with that guy and she is really happy."

As Nicole discusses her feelings of teen pregnancy and the difficulty it creates for her and her friends she says "I just don't think people our age should be having kids cause it just ruins their schooling and I don't think after when their kid grows up they would want to come back to school cause they would be going with younger students. That's why I kinda changed cause I don't want to come back to school with my [younger] sister." For Nicole the issue has been very

clearly thought through. I can make understanding of the circumstances she faces and feel pleased she can identify the consequences yet feel for her as she continues to forge on alone and from my observations she really is alone. Teen pregnancy is common (infact it is a norm) at Pohkweteh.

The reserve funding agencies such as the educational department and social services department grant monies to students and their dependents while they attend school. This funding arrangement appears to encourage young students to have dependents as they would receive more money from various agencies. Further to this idea children become valid "excuses" for parents and grant them more freedom. Andy feels that "somehow they [teen parents] use their kids as an excuse. Like my baby was sick or sometimes it's not always true otherwise...basically you [parents] fight for spots to get their babies into daycare. They get those spots. They take their kid to the daycare but they don't come to school." Andy he feels that young parents learn to play the system early on. He feels that "they have more rights since they are a parent."

It is comforting to see that students realize the true effects and consequence of teen pregnancy. They have been granted good understanding of the effects mostly from their immediate families. Since the issue affects most teens in someway they become educated on the issue in many ways. For some the importance of family and the hope to maintain lasting friendships within the community become difficult circumstances to deal with.

Poverty

Poverty is a issue that affects most reserve populations. The informants each brought up the issue of money; more particularly the misuse of social assistance given to people on the reserve. Since a large number of the reserve population live below the poverty line it becomes difficult for most residents to meet basic needs. The informants in the study raised the issue of paydays or days when cheques arrive in the mail.

Joel begins by setting the stage of what generally can be expected on social assistance day, pay days, or when cheques such as GST or family allowance arrive in the mail. He explains that "lots of people [classmates and students in school] try to go early. You'll see some parents come into the school giving their kids money, or taking them out of school" Joel is disappointed that some parents place little value on education.

I asked students to explain more about "willy" the term they refer to as welfare or social assistance. Most were aware that a single month allowance is $229.00. I asked who collected welfare. Sheila claimed "practically the whole reserve." Nicole explains "I think practically all the senior high are on willy." Tyler explains that there are older people in school who have to rely on social assistance as their income. "Some of them have children they want to go to school and don't want to quit school to have a job." He believes that there are some students who use social assistance "for good purpose...there are some I

would say 40% that would go out and do something not so good with their money...not so productive." Nicole explains that "a lot of people make fun of people on willy...'oh they can't support their own self' I don't want to be like that."

There are those families who rely on social assistance. Families who are forced to survive on the limited income supplied by social services to lead a life that is limited financially. For teens attending school this poverty often affects their learning and achievement. Leanne refers to a classmate this past year.

> There was this boy in my class. He doesn't hardly come to school, say for one class then he leaves cause I think he's afraid because he has nobody to talk to and he's like he comes to school dirty and it's gross...his parents are real drunks and they're into cocaine and everything...he has lots of brothers and sisters..well they live on willy right now so and their mom they spend it all on drugs...it affects the children...emotionally and spiritually...its hard for them to fit in with other kids...he doesn't talk at all.

Leanne feels sympathy for her classmate for the feelings he must endure for what she believes is based on his family's financial situation. He has since dropped out of school. Leanne believes that it was just too difficult for him to survive in school.

Each of the informants are aware of people who misuse the system and provide examples of the common misuses. Nicole explains "they're [most high school students collecting social assistance on the reserve] using their willy to go out and party...they'll just use it up all in one night next day they will be bumming off people, their parents." Sheila explains that some high school students spend

the money wisely while other "people buy drugs." Andy claims that some people spend the entire amount in less than three days. He explains "who knows what they need not just one good drink or one good blast." Nicole realizes that "some people rip off the reserve...they say they're living with someone but they really are living at home."

Nicole explains that "willy is just an extra...it's just extra cash from the reserve they are not just giving it to you...it's free money that's what they call it. Activity on social assistance can be especially increased on the monthly social assistance day. Sheila explains that in the village center "on willy days there's lots of crazy...everybody just yells on allowance day....there's like drug lords over there...lot of people smoke drugs there...[she sighs] and a lot of people drive around til 12 o'clock at night." She doesn't feel much danger by all the activity however she doesn't like having to be near it each month. Joel also refers to the village center on a welfare night. "Once in awhile at the townsite I will just see people just playing music and I will just see a lot of people there just hear beer bottles everything...I don't think that's right to be doing that on the reserve." Joel feels that this type of activity is common on the reserve. He believes that it occurs "mostly it would on willy, paydays, uh...family allowance, anytime someone got their hands on money."

It is refreshing to see that students can identify the dysfunction and the misuse of the social assistance money. Further they consider the destruction it

does to those who become reliant on it. Tyler explains "it's just getting them so dependent...it's such a dependence to them [if they are on welfare]. They need to like practice a work ethic you know like in school. If you learn to work hard in school.... you're gonna learn how to work hard in the work force." Tyler sees welfare as a way people become "addicted almost..when they're old, say like mid 20's, they gotta go back and finish up high school and once they're done that, they're nearly in their 30's [but otherwise you'd be] finished you have your university or college degree and you're in your mid 20's and you're ready to work. See it's just holding you back from where you would want to be or where you would dream to be." Tyler sees the longer term effects of collecting from the system. Further he understands the dependency it creates. It places one in a difficult cycle that is nearly impossible to break out of.

School and Community

Each of the informants expressed their need to have Native teachers. Joel explained that although it was not of high importance to have Native teachers he felt that it was necessary to have Native teachers in the reserve school. Joel explains that non-Native teachers who teach in the reserve school are sensitive to the cultural differences. He explains "they [non-Native teachers] are teaching here so they will be nice to us." Tyler also felt that "there needs to be a variety of teachers [both Native and non-Native]." He further explained that teachers most importantly needed to be specialized in their areas. He explains "we need Native

teachers to teach Cree." Both Joel and Tyler appreciate the variety of both Native and non-Native teachers still they feel a need for Native teachers in school.

Nicole explains "I like having Indian teachers...they understand you...they take time to help you understand things." Leanne also reports that many times the teachers are active in the community and participate in community functions. She appreciates that she can interact with Native teachers outside of school. She says "you can have fun with them cause they know you...like how you are." Andy explains;

> pretty well basically Native teachers are like my friends...I could relate to and talk openly to [pause] we can talk openly to each other cause we have a trust between each other because we come from the same culture and I don't think you can be that open with a white person cause they don't know where I am from...

Andy discusses how in the past he has had difficulty with non-Native teachers and as a result did poorly in school. He explains he learned to "just cope with it and do my work to pass the class..." Andy feels that "if it's a Native teacher you're guaranteed to do well...I could go for help I know they will be there [for me]." As we continue to discuss his appreciation of Native teachers and the need for them in school he explains it is "the trust...the bond" between Native teachers and Native students that guarantee his success.

The communications and interaction between school staff and parents is minimal. Few parents attend parent teacher nights to review their child's progress. This seemed to be the case more at the junior and senior highschool

levels as opposed to the elementary level. The number of parents visiting teachers vary from teacher to teacher. At the high school level it is not alarming if a teacher has no parents attending parent teacher night. There are various reasons for this as some students no longer live at home and as discussed in a previous theme students sometimes live away from home for financial reasons. When students are over 16 years of age and not residing in their parent or guardian's home they may qualify to receive a monthly social assistance allowance. In the past Pohkweteh has tried a variety of strategies to involve parents and the community with the school. Feasts, a parent involvement committee, and a small informal gathering have all been attempted with little success to involve more parents in the school. It seems that parents do however, attend parent teacher conferences when the teacher is Native.

Leanne and Andy make reference to parents and their role and interest in education as a factor that affects achievement. Sheila explains "I think it's the parents. They don't pay enough attention to them [children]. I know if I wasn't being paid attention to I wouldn't want to do anything they wanted" Sheila attributes poor parenting for low achievement as well as children not having opportunity to take part in different activities. On the flip side Andy explains how some parents enable their children although, not intentionally, they harm their children in different respects. Andy explains how some parents will falsify information so their child will avoid consequences. In school students who have

been absent must supply the school with a letter signed by their parent so that the absence can be excused. He explains "if they miss [students] they get their parents to write them letters...to lie for them basically...and some parents will do it. I tried it, it worked. I can be honest I tried it, it worked."

"Taken For Granted"

Many of the informants expressed the attitude that is held by adults in the community. Throughout Nicole's interview she expressed not being valued as the young adult she is. Her independence has been encouraged for the most part yet it has been stripped away on many incidents. She discusses the times she felt she was mistreated especially by older relatives. She explains "my auntie used to make me and my sister babysit for her...she never used to pay us...she thought she didn't have to." Although Nicole didn't expect payment from her aunt she felt it was unfair that her aunt would pay daycare fees as well pay other babysitters. Nicole explains that her aunt began to take her for granted and later would "just expect" Nicole to do so as she was needed. Sheila expresses the same concern in babysitting. She explains a particular time when she planned on attending a community teen dance. Her aunt reassured her that she would return home in time for her to attend the dance. "I waited until three a.m.. she still didn't come home...when she got home the next morning she was acting mad as if I did something wrong...She didn't tell me where she went." Sheila felt unappreciated and taken for granted. She explains "she didn't pay me." I could sense Nicole

and Sheila's frustration in feeling taken for granted especially by their family. Each of the girls explain the difficulty in avoiding the situation as they feel an obligation to babysit their younger relatives. They both feel that their time and interests are viewed less important than their aunts interests.

"They Want Us To Act As Adults"

Tyler felt that over and over he is not taken seriously and his opinion and concerns are of little importance. He feels that the attitude held by adults, both in school and the community, becomes more critical of him as he becomes older. He explains that he is "not respected at an adult level..yet they [adults of the community] want us to act like adults..they don't treat us or respect us as adults." Andy carries this thought further claiming "the older people look at us sort of like a bacteria." He presents the many mixed messages the adults of the community give him. He discusses leadership and feels frustrated in being encouraged to participate in band meetings yet realizing that he is not valued. He explains "older people are not listening to younger people..[we the] youth have something to talk about but at band meetings you know we can sit there with our hand raised for a long time before we get a chance to talk." He feels that leadership have a responsibility to the youth as they "are the future leaders" yet they do not acknowledge them as they would like to be acknowledged. Andy explains he feels "not wanted then they [leadership of the community] don't know that they are not gonna be here [forever] what's gonna happen to us their grand kids, their

great grand kids...what are we gonna do if they lose our rights right now?..."

Andy feels that many times as an adolescent he is judged and classed as a "bacteria." He expresses his disappointment in adults of the community especially those that he feels judge him. He explains that there are adults who say "I never used to do this and this [bad habits of adolescents today] and then you find out all the dirt on them...and they actually did. Its like they try make you follow a good life...like a phony life..." Andy looks to the future with concern. He takes into consideration the values past on to him of maintaining the rights of his people and the reserve. Both Andy and Tyler can identify the need to take on leadership roles and to take on adult roles. They both however feel powerless finding acceptance as young men.

The honesty and sincerity that each participant provided was indicative of their understanding of factors that affect their lives. With each theme it became evident that they acknowledged and understood that there were factors detrimental to their academic achievement. In the next chapter these understanding and insights will be discussed in a broader analytical context.

CHAPTER V

My Conclusions With Recommendations and Hopes For The Future

Conducting this study has been an a extremely insightful experience. Today as I think back to my initial interest in graduate school I realize that I have received far beyond what I had hoped for. My confidence and interest in teaching came from contact with the one and only Native school teacher in the local high school on my home reserve. Returning as a graduate student I was further stimulated and inspired by contact with a number of Indigenous scholars. I began to realize just how significant and meaningful that experience was. Learning from someone that you trust to have a similar world view, a similar cultural framework with its inherent values, attitudes, behaviors is an experience that mainstream students enjoy on a daily and yearly basis. I had only now been granted this privilege; a privilege that has had paramount affect on my life. Having opportunity to revisit that first positive relationship would awaken in me a whole new dimension of understanding.

My new learnings however did not come pain free. Once the data collection process was complete I had the privilege of attending and mingling with a number of eminent Indigenous scholars at the University of Alberta's Second Tri-Annual Indigenous Scholars Conference. They too had spoken of their frustrations with the mainstream school system. After the conference, I returned home to my own reserve community. I pondered the words of the students I had

interviewed and I ruminated on the words of the Indigenous scholars. I became uncertain, frustrated, bordering on depression. I was being pulled into the research and at the same time I wondered if I was not part of the problem after all, I too was perpetuating the system by being a teacher in that system. Before continuing I needed to assess and look more closely at the role I played as a First Nations educator. I questioned the true benefits of the current system; the system I now realize was failing students. My anguish and loss hit very hard as I confronted my role in perpetuating a culturally insensitive system. I experienced guilt and accused myself (as a First Nations person) of acts of bigotry. I now realized this had all been a set up since my first day of walking into the classroom where I began my teacher training years before. For a time I was immobilized. I put my data aside and remained at home hoping I might find some answer there. My initial response was to deny that I was part of the problem. Then as I began to accept the responsibility the following two months became a time of grieving, of loss, and saddness. I struggled with finding some insight that would evaluate my role as a Native Educator in a positive light.

As I spent time alone with my thoughts, I still knew that the answers must come from the students, but I realized that my focus had been misplaced. It was not the students who were failing to achieve, but rather it was the system that was failing them; and I was part of that system. In my eagerness to find answers I had perpetuated the problem. The only way that I could find some sense of

comfort and peace with where I stood was to once again attempt to merge my Indigenous roots and knowledge systems with the literary teachings of the western world. I went back to books and writings of mainstream (although often radical) writers. As I read the teachings of Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* (1997), I found that my dilemma was not uncommon. Cleary and Peacock, (1998), refer to Freire's work on critical consciousness by explaining that before we can be free we need to realize we are enslaved. "Freire wasn't [only] speaking of awakening the critical consciousness of the oppressed; he was also speaking to the need for educators to confront themselves and their own practices, which have sometimes enslaved the schools that purport to educate children and ultimately enslaved educators...The first step.....begins with confronting ourselves" (p.254).

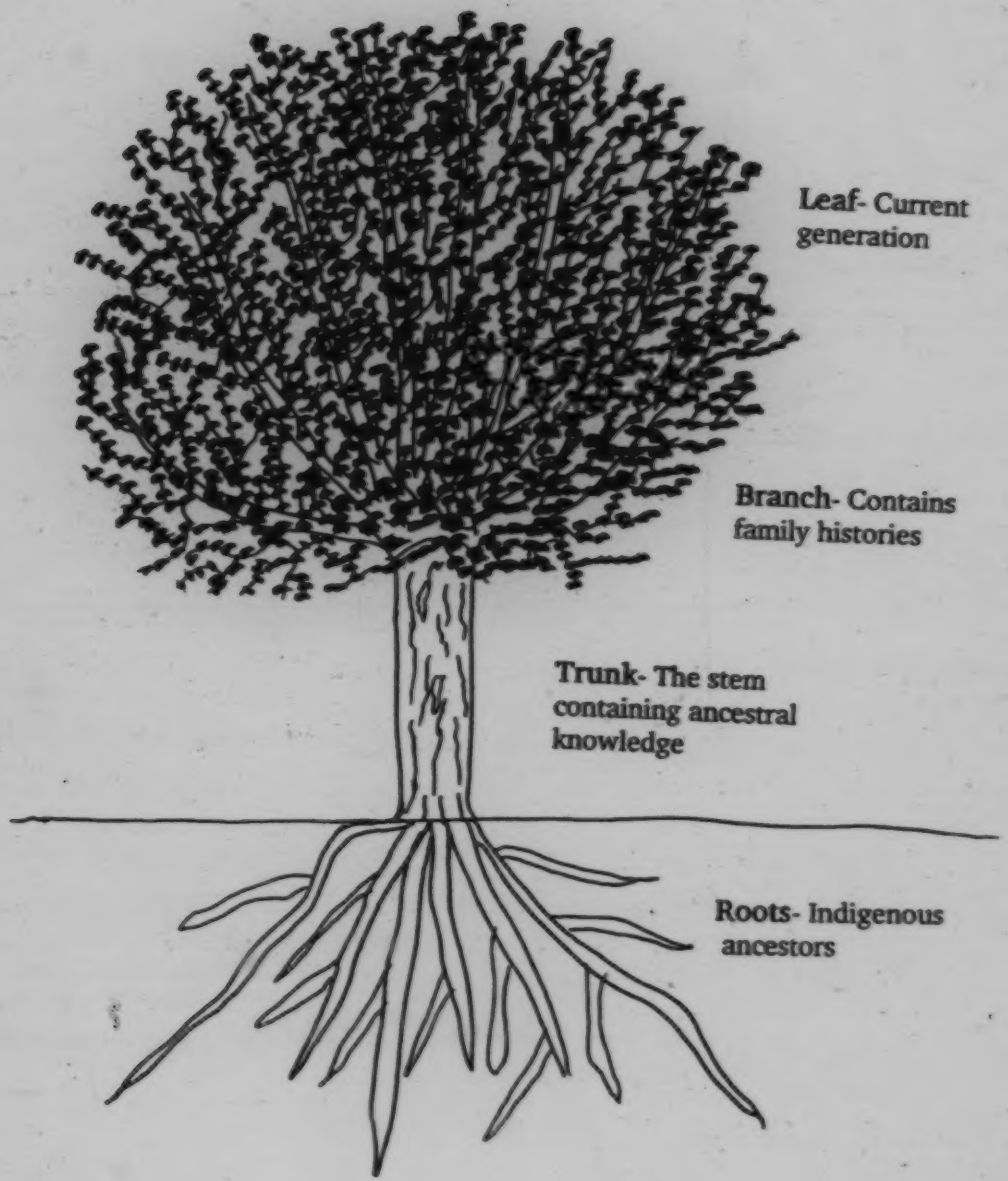
The history of the past five hundred years and the effects on Native Education in Canada have been devastating to all Native communities. The effects of colonization and systemic genocide continue. The identified issues presented by the students are only symptoms of a much larger issue; an issue that places the mainstream educational system in the center; a cycle of failure and corruption where students become victims. And as the system effectively victimizes the students, they turn inward and begin to blame themselves, their parents and their community. The amazing insight for was that the students I interviewed were already able to analyze the situation. They did not necessarily

say that they were victims of colonization but they did know that forces within the system were working against them. They knew that their salvation rested with their inherent Indigenous knowledge. As Duran and Duran (1995) say "Our 'communities' indigenous forms of knowledge were and continue to be relevant as we face the task of overcoming colonial mind-sets that so many of us have internalized" (p.6).

I came to realize that the more I understood the system, the more I could resist its negative influences. As a teacher it is now my role to teach my students about that system which causes the alcohol and drug abuse, the racism, the teen pregnancy, and the extreme poverty. Because they are so resilient they already know that all this is not their fault. But I need to let them know that none of it is their failure to accept. They play an important role in maintaining and carrying on the inherent wisdom of their ancestors.

I came into the study carrying various beliefs about youth existing in some kind of void. It was refreshing to see their strength and firmly rooted wisdom. They are connected to their roots. Their ancestral knowledge sustains them-and like the tree, with nourishment they will grow. They are resilient. They have remained strong. The strength in their words, in their expression, and the confidence they present are evidence of just how resilient they are.

The Tree Analogy


Leaf- Current generation
Branch- Contains family histories
Trunk- The stem containing ancestral knowledge
Roots- Indigenous ancestors

Now as I go back to *my* tree I have new insights. I think of the overall physical parts of the tree: the roots, the trunk, the branches, and the leaves. I look more closely at what life is within the tree and how it is nurtured. I am provided with a clear comparison to the overall physical, social, emotional, and spiritual being of the individuals who live and are part of the reserve community. Each of the physical parts of the tree represent past generations, in fact the soil upon which the tree is nourished comes from the composted remains of our ancestors. The roots represent time immemorial. Ancestral knowledge and wisdom continue throughout the tree extending through the trunk, to each branch, and eventually to each leaf. So this Indigenous knowledge resides in each part of the tree. As the tree is nurtured from the ground upward each leaf is fed knowledge and wisdom. Each new set of leaves is a new generation. Branches carry specific family knowledge to each leaf. However, it is the roots that keep us tied together and remind us that we come from the same place and that we have shared knowledge from our beginnings as an Indigenous people.

When thinking of this stem I cannot help but think of what Dr. Kinuwa (in press) said "Because you come from thousands of years of inheritance, your cellular knowledge is embodied in you and so you cannot lose the feeling of [being a] Cree. There are thousands of years in your cellular system that are awakened by the vibrations of your Cree language and all the other languages you speak. So [although] you can lose the verbal part of it....you cannot lose the

context of your language even though you can lose the ability to speak it." He further explains that when elders die they do not take with them this sacred Indigenous knowledge rather they leave it for the coming generations.

The tree is analogous to the entire earth. From an ecological standpoint one must consider the interdependency of the tree and its relationship to the environment. The tree provides key elements to sustain life just as the tree is reliant on the environment for life. The rebirth continues with each new seed and provides life for new generations. The living aspects of the tree provide many insights, such as the realization that we remain rooted and that we are part of everything.

As an Indigenous educator I take pride in acknowledging Indigenous knowledge and the form in which it is passed on. As an educator I now realize the multi-faceted aspects that such knowledge can elicit. With the understanding that Indigenous knowledge is multi-faceted and whole, various methods and learning styles need to be included for the planning and delivery of curriculum. Since Indigenous knowledge relies on the notion of holism it is important to include and consider the past and present, living and non-living aspects of the culture of the community. For educators teaching the Indigenous student it is important to apply processes with an open approach and to consider the whole aspects of the community in its delivery.

The students in this study accept Indigenous knowledge as their own and

this is what sustains them and makes them resilient. Each Indigenous born person *ekasis'pohtahk* (carries on and passes on the inherent wisdom) for the benefit of the coming generations.

Recommendations For the Future

Having completed this research I realize that:

1) More Native researchers need to do research in Native communities.

2) There needs to be more Native teachers in Native schools.

3) Non-Native teachers need to receive training from Native Educators. This training must become mandatory in order for non-Native teachers to work with Native students.

4) All children both Native and Non-Native must be taught about colonialism and the negative affects of colonization. More particularly all students need to be taught about racism, how to identify and how to respond to it.

5) Curriculum must be more community responsive involving all members of the community in the planning stages.

6) Curriculum developed by and for First Nations communities must extend outside the community to society at large, for its implications have global significance.

My Own Commitment

- I will commit to assisting my school and community in realizing that the local community and particularly young people on the reserve have to be involved in the process and the product of their own education.

- I will commit to talking about my research and to continuing my own search for a balance in two worlds.

- I am committed to looking at myself with greater trust because I too have some powerful answers...This can be frightening but I am comforted by the words of Mandela.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We are born to manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us, It's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
We unconsciously give others permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

Nelson Mandela
(1994 Inaugral Speech)

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